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Welcome to the wild roadshow where the Di was cast for Hillary

By JACQUI REEVES

There were no warnings, briefings or official schedules. Princess Diana came, saw and created mass pandemonium, without so much as a royal wave. South African and overseas paparazzi speculated and debated about the princess's whereabouts – all she had to do to start a panic was be there.

Some leading ladies do, however, have to work a little harder at creating the right image for their arrival and roadshow.

"Come out and meet Hillary Clinton!" – shouted organisers with loudhailers – "Come and meet the first lady!"

Confused Soweto residents came out of their homes. "Hillary who?" they asked, wondering why so many police officers had taken up vantage points outside a cemetery. This week's Diana and Hillary visits certainly proved one thing: it's not about what you do, but rather the perceptions you create – and the show that helps you create them.

Some may call it a farce, but I prefer to think of it as a political cabaret, "The Dance of the Democrats" – or, if Bob Dole makes a comeback – "The Republican Rumba" (a cabaret without a stripper, naturally).



HILLARY WHO? Residents weren't sure who she was

Al Gore's visit last year was a prime example of perceptions ruling reality.

Journalists were summoned to the airport for the vice-president's arrival, just three hours before the touchdown – I mean, it's not like we have anything else to do.

Having walked the half-kilometre stretch to the landing site, expressionless secret-service agents prodded us into a roped-off section. I've seen cattle receive better treatment.

Police dogs sniffed bags, secret-service agents patted us down, and a few photographers actually tried to reason with them

TREFWOORDE

1. Reeves
2. Jacqui
3. Suid-Afrika
4. Bureaue
5. Princess Diana
6. Clinton H
7. Vergeelyking
8. Journaliste
9. Gore A
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- wasted breath, I'm afraid.

Fear and loathing best describes them. That, and very, very big, with funny things in their ears and significant bulges in their clothing...

They epitomise all that is healthy and toxin free, and are politically correct in the extreme. They have African-Americans, whites, Hispanics, even a native American for good measure.

Wherever they go, one thing remains a constant - they spend all their time mumbling conspiratorially into their sleeves.

Microphones appear like growths from the back of their necks and they always seem to have something to tell someone.

Finally, Al and Tipper arrive, and condescendingly look down at us from their makeshift podium.

A dull speech, expertly peppered with broad promises and a few platitudes, follows, after which the couple make a dive for their cavalcade.

Now this was impressive. A line of limousines, police cars and traffic vehicles roared to life, disappearing into the cold Highveld night.

The Hillary and Chelsea Roadshow was as impressive, managing to attract the crowds, cordon off the roads and infuriate the locals.

Strong-arm tactics

Even the Premier, Tokyo Sexwale, looked as though his feathers had been a little ruffled by the strong-arm tactics of the secret service.

One can only imagine what matters of national importance kept those agents chatting down their jacket sleeves all day.

Perhaps they were speculating whether Hillary's neon-pink suit made her an easier target for sharpshooters.

Or perhaps it was less cerebrally inclined and they were simply debating the relative merits of a Castle and a Budweiser.

Despite Hillary's attempts to delve into the meaty subjects of education and the struggle for democracy, many guests seemed more interested with the wonderful success achieved by Chelsea's orthodontist, and Hillary's use of an alic band.

The public and media do, however, seem to be fascinated with the banal routines of the rich and famous.

All over the world, people are fascinated by the day-to-day habits of Socks, the presi-

dential cat, and Chelsea's move into her freshman year of college.

Internationally, the well informed have a working knowledge of Diana's colonic irrigation techniques, the name of her gym trainer and her extraordinary abilities on the "thigh master".

The fact that Hillary's suite in Rosebank cost R5 000 a night was a fascinating snippet and the added tit-bit that her 45-member delegation were with her was even juicier.

The real scoop, however, was Diana. Where was she? Where was she shopping? With whom was she lunching? All the vital information.

In one week South Africans have been rubbing shoulders with a princess as well as a first lady - and a Grammy winner at that (Mrs Clinton won it for her audio book *It Takes a Village*).

The resultant euphoric feeding frenzy left photographers, writers and gossip-mongers gasping for breath.

It is, however, all about the show, the spectacle, and the power of the package.

Hillary relied on flashy suits, loudhailers and intimidating bodyguards.

Princess Diana has only to rely on the sordid history of British royalty

to secure her immortal place in the limelight. Not even *The Bold and the Beautiful* or *Days of Our Lives* can supply the constant flow of marital disputes, illicit frolics, eating disorders and temper tantrums that British royalty can.

And, of course, this week's startling news that Fergie's cheeky Jack Russell terrier, Bendix, had nipped some of the maids at Buckingham Palace.

Scandal-starved South Africans were eager to lap it all up.

The props have been packed up, and the show is back on the road, I guess we'll have to rely on our own celebrities again - what was that about Graca ... ?



DIANA: Doesn't have to do much to create a stir

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